

April 25, 2010

Isaiah 30:15 / Matthew 22:1-7 / Revelation 19:6-9 / Luke 14:15-24

## Reasons People Reject God's Gracious Invitation

Today I want to begin by asking you THREE questions. Questions which Jesus will go on to answer for us in this morning's text:

- 1<sup>st</sup>) What is the kingdom of God like? What is the overall image the Bible paints?
- 2<sup>nd</sup>) Who is invited to be there in it?
- 3<sup>rd</sup>) When one realizes what the kingdom of God is really like, why would they ever make them reject such a free and gracious invitation to be there?

Those are the questions JESUS answers for us today, in these 9 short verses! So, without any further delay let's look at each one in the order they come to us in the text.

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The **FIRST** question being: *"What is the kingdom of God like?"* And we don't have to look far to find the answer! Because Jesus supplies it for us when He uses the banquet or dinner party He is attending as a springboard for sharing that the kingdom of God is in many ways like that — a joyful, happy, festive celebration. Meaning that Tony Campolo was right when he entitled one of his many books: "The Kingdom of God is a Party!" When published it did raise a few pious eyebrows, but what he suggests is true. Jesus does equate the kingdom of God with a joyful party atmosphere — and not just here!

You see, as much as there has been (in the past) a more somber, quiet, melancholy view of the kingdom of God as a place (or better yet, a state of existence) where people would quietly stroll around in white robes, with hands folded and faces smiling (like monks strolling through a huge brightly lit cathedral with the rays of the sun beaming down on them), the imagery the Bible uses is much different!

For as Jesus tells us today, the kingdom is much more akin to being at a lavish dinner party (Luke 14:16) / or a wedding reception or banquet (Matthew 22:2-8 / Matthew 25:1-10 / Revelation 19:6-9). A celebration with delicious food and great fellowship and much joy, and music and dancing and other festivities.

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In fact, when Jesus turned the water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, his purpose was to give everyone there a sign of the inbreaking of the kingdom in Him. Because in the OT one of the things that was repeatedly used to foreshadow the blessings of the Kingdom of

God, was the promise of a future when their land would overflow with “an abundance of grain and new wine; a land of bread and vineyards” (Gen. 27:28 / Prov. 3:10 / Is. 36:17 / Amos 9:13 / Zech. 10:6-8 / and many more).

Abundance of new wine, as D. A. Carson rightly notes, signaled the ***“introduction of the messianic age... the new dispensation of grace and fulfillment that Jesus was inaugurating.”*** And His turning water into wine (six clay jars holding twenty to thirty gallons each!) was the initial sign that the kingdom of God was indeed breaking in upon the present in Him!

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In fact, Paul used similar imagery when addressing arguments and divisions in the church in Rome over whether it was “sin” to drink a glass of wine or eat meat (or meat sacrificed to idols) or celebrate some days as being more holy than others. There he kindly reminded them (and us through them) of the one thing they needed to remember to put things in their proper perspective when such divisive issues arose in the church.

And what was that one all-important thing? That, ***“the kingdom of God is NOT about eating and drinking (that is, in this case, it is not about what you can or cannot eat, or can and cannot drink) but about righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”***

It was his way of saying: “Don’t let arguments over morally grey areas and insignificant things ruin the unity of spirit and peaceful relationships and joyful fellowship God wants you to have in the church! Because the KOG is a celebration!”

It’s about enjoying each other and not critiquing or judging each other. / It’s about being willing to overlook our inevitable differences in regard to the morally grey areas of life, and not making them a matter of joy killing division, dissension or offense.

It’s about joy and peace, and the blessing of celebrating together what Christ has done for us!  
It’s about close, loving fellowship or *“koinonia”* in the Greek, which literally means “companionship,” “partnership,” and “joint ownership.”

It was even used as another word for “marriage” or “a life spent together in which every-thing is shared.” / It describes “the bond which binds Christians to each other, to Christ, to God the Father and the Holy Spirit.” / It’s true, committed, relational sharing in the lives of other believers where we open our hearts to them, share life’s blessings with them and even lay down our lives for them.

So, what then does the kingdom of God involve? Enjoying spiritual fellowship with others! / Rejoicing with Jesus and joy in the worship of God as we praise and magnify the infinite perfections and beauty and wonders of His Being!

John describes what the kingdom is like in His vision in Revelation 19:16-9. And what does he describe it as? A wedding feast! *"Hallelujah,"* he says, *"for the Lord God Almighty reigns! Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has made herself ready! Fine linen, bright and clean was given her to wear (fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints). Then the angel said to me, "Write: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding banquet of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God."* (And please remember that a Jewish wedding reception or banquet went on for many days, and sometimes up to a week, unlike our 5-6 hours of celebration!)

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And what does the banquet imagery represent? It represents having our soul thirst quenched / and our spiritual hunger satisfied / and holy yearnings fulfilled / and every godly desire gratified. It represents total satisfaction in God!

The metaphor of "feasting," as opposed to simply eating, says David Gooding, *"assures us that (in the kingdom) every true appetite, desire, or longing given to us by God... will be granted in the richest and most sublime fulfillment."*

R. Kent Hughes concurs: *"Jesus offers the kingdom as a perpetual feast of peace, help, guidance, friendship, rest, victory over self, control of passions and supremacy over circumstances. A feast of joy, tranquility, deathlessness, heaven opened and immeasurable hope — that is, salvation... The 'great banquet' is a lavish, sumptuous image of the kingdom of God that will be exceeded only by its reality of joyous satisfaction!"*

That's what God invites you to when He invites you to enter the kingdom of God! An eternal feast where God Himself and the inexhaustible riches of His grace and blessings are the main course of what we will feast on for all eternity — a feast that begins the moment we come to Christ in faith.

Jonathan Edwards put it this way in a quote I pasted into my Bible: *"God Himself is the great good which the saints are brought to the possession and enjoyment of by redemption. God is the great inheritance of the saints; He is the portion of their souls. God is their*

*wealth and treasure, their food, their life, their everlasting honor and glory... He is the great good which the redeemed are received to at death... The glorious excellencies and beauty of God will be what will entertain the minds of the saints, and the love of God will be their everlasting feast."*

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That's the predominant image of what the kingdom of God is like, which brings us to our **SECOND** question: *"Who is it that is invited to that great banquet or wedding party we call the kingdom of God?"* And to answer that question, we need only look to vv. 21-24, where Jesus tells us *"the Master,"* angry that everyone he invited *"all began to make excuses"* (v. 18), and refused his gracious invitation to come to the banquet, says to his servant, *"Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind & the lame."*

Why quickly? Because the food had already been purchased and prepared and cooked and was ready to be served, and would just have to be thrown out if no one came, because they didn't have refrigeration!

You see, what you need to know to understand the passage (and may have missed when I read it in verses 16-17) is that in Hebrew culture there were always two invitations given to such a banquet.

The first invitation was given weeks in advance, with the initial "yes" or "no" response to the invitation given by the people at that time. And on the basis of their "yes" or "no" responses at that time, the host giving the banquet could know how much food to buy and prepare and how many cooks, waiters or servants to hire for the occasion.

That's why it says in verse 16: *"A certain man was preparing to have a great banquet and invited many guests."* And it means — weeks in advance. The first invitation went out weeks ahead, and apparently, at that time, everyone said, "Yes, we'll be there. Count us in!"

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Then you'll notice a second invitation was sent out on the day of the feast. A servant would be sent out to the people who had already said "yes," to tell them it was now time to come, since everything was almost cooked and ready to serve!

That's verse 17, where we read: *"At the time of the banquet, he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited"* (and, we could add, "to tell those who had said "yes" to the initial invitation") *'Come, for everything is now ready.'*

That's why the Master gets so angry when everyone starts giving him excuses! Not because the person said "no" to the initial invitation, but because initially they had all said: "Yes! I'll come! You can count on me and my wife (or me and my family)! We'll be there for sure."

That's why he's so upset! He's already bought all the luscious food and hired people to cook it (food that will now go to waste because there is no refrigeration)! He's already rented the extra tables and bought table cloths and hired even more people to serve and wait table so he can treat his guests like royalty.

Yet each one backs out and leaves their host with all this deliciously prepared food and absolutely no one to celebrate his special occasion with him! No one wants to come!

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So what does he do? He determines that this wonderful meal will not be wasted and thus sends his servants into the streets and alley ways and tells them to "***Bring in from the streets and alleyways*** (that is, the places where the homeless and social outcasts all live) ***the lame and blind and crippled and poor.***"

Notice he didn't send them to the well-to-do neighborhoods or to people with houses! He didn't send them to the homes of the well-to-do, because they are the excuse makers! Only people of substantial means could afford to buy land without even checking it out first! Or five yoke of oxen, sight unseen, without even first "trying them out"!

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So who do such people represent? The JEWISH PEOPLE, who had been given much by way of being God's chosen people; the recipients of His covenant favor and blessings.

You see, it's those wealthy enough to eat luscious food at their homes all the time, that don't find an invitation to eat luscious food at someone else's house such a big deal! Especially when some pressing issue or business matter comes up!

The person who eats lobster and prime rib and caviar and lots of fruit and dips at their own home on a regular basis, doesn't find an invitation to eat lobster and prime rib and caviar at someone else's home enticing enough to miss out on other things.

That's why the Master (who represents God) is equally determined to say in verse 24:

***"I tell you not one of those men who were invited (and he means the one's who said they would come first time) will get a taste of my banquet."***

Thus the Master tells his servants to, ***“Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house may be full!”*** It’s without question a prophetic reference to God’s gracious calling and merciful inclusion of the Gentiles in the kingdom of God.

In fact, sadly enough, although the church in the Middle Ages correctly understood that THAT IS what it referred to, they unfortunately took the phrase ***“make them come in,”*** or literally ***“force them to enter,”*** as justification for using the sword or military conquest to force non-Christian people adopt the Christian faith — as was sometimes the case in Northern Europe, South America, the Middle East, and elsewhere — though it is NOT at all what it means!

The point is that everyone (even the poor, lame, crippled, blind or heathen Gentiles) would need some persistent convincing to overcome their natural resistance to believe that God merely wanted to bless people with a free meal!

Yet that is the Gospel invitation: ***“Come,”*** says God in Isaiah 55:1-3, ***“Come all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come buy and eat! Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost... Listen, listen to me and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me that your soul might live.”***

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So who is invited to the wedding banquet or celebration we call the kingdom of God? God tells us in the first verse of that passage. It’s ***“all who are thirsty.”*** Or again, ***“All who are hungry and desire to eat what is good and feast on the richest of fare.”*** The invitation goes out to ALL who hunger and thirst!

There are no exceptions! If you’re hungry and thirsty for what God has to offer at His feast, you’re invited to come! And it’s all **FREE!**

Yet, despite the fact that it is free and that what God offers is so incomparable, the only ones who will actually come, are those who WANT what is being offered at the table He has set for us!

Which is what? JESUS — the Bread of heaven and the Living Water! / The opportunity to feast on the richest of fare (GOD Himself) and satisfy every spiritual craving with Christ, who is the Manna that comes down from heaven!

To taste the sweetness of pardon and forgiveness / and the Fruit of the Spirit / and drink from pitchers overflowing with the new wine of God’s intoxicating presence!

To feast on healing herbs and luscious figs and sweet grapes and ice cold milk and honey dripping from the comb — symbols of all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

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You see, the invitation to His kingdom feast or wedding banquet is offered to ALL who hunger and thirst for the things of God. In fact, it's being offered to you right now through me — the second invitation — the invitation that says ***"everything has been made ready!"***

Pardon has been purchased! Salvation secured! It's all finished! You can come and feast on Christ through faith right now!

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Which brings us to our **LAST** question: Why would people, knowing God simply wants to bless them, reject His gracious invitation in Christ? And without going into much detail, the two excuses Jesus cites BOTH say essentially the same thing: That other things – possessions and business endeavors / real estate and buying things / doing other things that would increase their earthly wealth and social standing or make them more comfortable while on this earth, appealed to their carnal appetites, and controlled their affections and longings, and dictated their likes and dislikes, MORE than what God and His kingdom feast had to offer.

It's really that simple. They had said "yes" to the initial invitation, when the party was still a long way off, and it really didn't interfere with any of their precious activities.

But when it came to actually dropping what they were engaged in, and putting aside what their affections were engrossed in, and prying their hearts away from what they were attached to, it became vividly clear that they really didn't want what they had formerly said they wanted. They had said, "We want to be in the kingdom." But when the groom (Jesus) came and said, "The feast is now ready, follow me, or come to me," they said "We have other things to do. We're not interested."

When it came time to actually choose between what they gave lip service to wanting, and what they really wanted at that time, the kingdom of God took a back seat, and their worldly endeavors won out. And because they did, God (speaking as the Master) says: "I tell you, not one of those men who were invited (and initially said they were interested) will get a taste of my banquet."

You see, it doesn't matter what we SAY we want when it interferes with nothing we're doing! What matters is what we choose to do when the actual invitation is pressed home and we must actually CHOOSE between what we're doing then and what God calls us to do.

What our heart IS attached to then, and what God calls us to attach it to. / Between earthly riches and comforts and the things of this world, and “all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms” that become ours the moment we come to Christ in faith.

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So today —as a servant of the Master — I’ve come to tell you, “The banquet is ready ***NOW!*** The food is set out and the meal is ready to be consumed ***NOW!*** *“NOW is the time of God’s favor,”* says Paul, *“today is the day of salvation.”*

But you say, “No, I’m just not ready today! I have other things I have to do!” Yet remember this: “The longer you put it off, my friends, the harder it becomes, and not the easier, to detach yourself from worldly enticements.”

The longer our affections are attached to earthly things, the harder it becomes to pull them away. Which means that if you struggle to say yes today, you’ll struggle even more as time goes by.

Let Jesus words to the excusers be a warning to you if you are in that place: *“Not one of those who were invited (but came up with an excuse) will get a taste of my banquet.”*

As God’s servant I call you to come. What will your answer be?